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FROM USMISSION UNESCO PARIS
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SUBJECT: USUNESCO: UNESCO SYMPOSIUM EXAMINES CULTURAL
DIVERSITY IN EAST-WEST CONTEXT

REF: PARIS 07446

1. SUMMARY and comment: UNESCO's Social and Human Sciences Sector held an international symposium on "Cultural Diversity and Transversal Values: East-West Dialogue on Spiritual-Secular Dynamics" on November 7-9. The symposium concluded with a communique identifying new directions for dialogue between the East and West in order to foster mutual respect. Cultural diversity, as related to the recently adopted Cultural Diversity Convention (CDC), was not extensively discussed, although intercultural dialogue was.

2. The Social and Human Sciences division of UNESCO is currently seeking a role for itself within UNESCO (reftel) by capitalizing on the momentum surrounding cultural diversity. However, we note that dialogue on civilizations is an increasingly important one for UNESCO and has been handled more convincingly in conferences and events organized by other sectors. This is a potential area of engagement for the U.S.[Septel] End summary and comment.

Cultural Diversity- Moving beyond the Convention

3. Cultural diversity was discussed in two ways throughout this symposium; the first was in regards to the CDC, the second looked at historical methods and exchanges of dialogue between diverse cultures. Director General Matsuura opened the symposium noting that adoption of the Cultural Diversity Convention (CDC) marks states' concerns regarding cultural impoverishment and universality in the context of rampant globalization. By adopting the convention, states have formulated policy to protect culture. Regarding cultural exchanges, Matsuura stressed that dialogue, particularly religious, is necessary to promote tolerance and understanding.

4. French and Japanese entities, including the French National Commission for UNESCO, were the symposium's primary organizers and participants. Participants, mainly academic, also came from the United States, China, the Republic of Korea, and the Holy See. Speakers covered five main themes: (1) the East-West historical meeting; (2) Mediators; (3) Cultural Diversity and the plurality of values; (4) the impact of modernity on cultural transfers; and (5) transversal values in a diverse world. The final communique identified six 'springboards' for future dialogue, which could be the subject of similar future symposia at UNESCO.

5. Comment. The symposium's abstract, philosophical approach stands in sharp contrast to the real-life phenomenon relating to cultural diversity - i.e. riots by French youth of sub-Saharan and North African heritage - that were never mentioned once as they flared near Paris while the symposium was taking place.

KOSS